

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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P R 202220Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5544
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, PINT, ES
SUBJECT: FURTHER NOTES ON TEJUTLA (EL SALITRE) INCIDENT AND
CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS

REF: SAN SALVADOR 4158

1. EMBASSY POLOFF AND DATT VISITED EL SALITRE (WHERE ACTUAL
SLAYINGS TOOK PLACE) AND TEJUTLA, THREE MILES AWAY, SATURDAY,
SEPT. 17. PRESIDENT ROMOERO HAD SUGGESTED TO ME TO DO SO IN
BELIEF THAT SUCH A VISIT WOULD CONFIRM GOES VERSION OF
INCIDENT. EMBOFFFS TALKED TO FOUR WOMEN AND TWO MEN IN EL
SALITRE AND FOUND ALL BUT ONE WILLING AND EAGER TO DISCUSS
SLAYING. SINCE EL SALITRE IS VERY SMALL VILLAGE (NO MORE THAN
50 HOUSES, WITH CHURCH, SCHOOL AND THREE SMALL SHOPS), ALL PERSONS
WITH WHOM SUBJECT DISCUSSED WERE IN SOME MANNER RELATED TO THE
THREE VICTIMS. VERSION OF ALL FIVE REMARKABLY SIMILAR, STATING
THAT RURAL POLICE HAD COME TO VILLAGE NIGHT OF AUGUST 26 AND
ENTERED THREE SEPARATE HOUSES WITHIN 50 YARD RADIUS KILLING
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ONE MAN IN EACH HOUSE. ALL STATED THAT MEN WERE KILLED FOR QTE
POLITICAL REASONS UNQTE BUT WOULD NOT OR COULD NOT ELABORATE
ON WHAT THIS MEANT. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION AS TO DEATH OF
RURAL POLICEMAN, ALL STATED THAT HE HAD BEEN KILLED SOMEWHERE
ELSE AND BODY BROUGHT TO VILLAGE. SEVERAL OF THE WOMAN STATED
THAT EL SALITRE VICTIMS HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN UNSPECIFIED WORK
FOR CATHOLIC CHURCH. ALL CATEGORICALLY DENIED THAT THREE MEN HAD

BEEN ENGAGED IN CATTLE RUSTLING OR OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES. WITNESSES APPEARED SINCERE IN THEIR ACCOUNTS OF INCIDENT BUT DUE TO CLOSENESS OF RELATIONSHIPS IN VILLAGE, COULD STILL BE REHEARSED OR PROMPTED COVER STORY FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES OF VICTIMS.

2. STORY OF PEOPLE IN EL SALITRE ALSO VARIES SLIGHTLY FROM VERSION ARCHBISHOP ROMERO REPEATED TO ME ON SEPT. 19 WHICH STATED THAT ONE OF VICTIMS, FELIPE DE JESUS, AN EMPLOYEE AT ILOPONGO AIRPORT WHO RETURNED TO VILLAGE OF EL SALITRE EACH WEEKEND, WAS FORCIBLY REMOVED FROM BUS AND LATER SHOT BY RURAL POLICE AND LEFT DEAD IN NEARBY FIELD. ALSO ARCHBISHOP'S VERSION IS THAT REMAINING TWO VICTIMS WERE KILLED BY POLICE IN SAME HOUSE. ARCHBISHOP STATED THAT FELIPE DE JESUS WAS NOT A CATECHIST, AS SUCH, BUT WAS CURSILLO (COURSE) DIRECTOR (SIMILAR TO SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER), AND RETURNED EACH WEEKEND TO THAT AREA TO ASSIST IN CHURCH SERVICES AND GIVEN HIS COURSES.

3. GROUP OF SMALL LAND HOLDERS IN CHALATENANGO PROVINCE CALLED ON GOVERNOR OF PROVINCE SEPT. 16 TO REQUEST ASSISTANCE FROM POLICE IN WHAT THEY CLAIM GROWING INCIDENCE OF CATTLE RUSTLING AND THIEVERY IN AREA (INCLUDING TEJUTLA, EL SALITRE), ADDING SOME SUPPORT TO GOES VERSION OF INCIDENT.

4. ON SEPTEMBER 16 I TOOK EMBASSY POLOFF AND PAO TO CALL ON PAPAL NUNCIO AT HIS RESIDENCE. PAPAL NUNCIO WAS EXCEEDING CRITICAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF ARCHBISHOP ROMERO AND STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT MANY PRIESTS AND BISHOPS IN EL SALVADOR WERE STRONGLY OPPOSED TO ARCHBISHOP'S ANTI-GOES POLICY. RELATIONS BETWEEN PAPAL NUNCIO AND ARCHBISHOP HAVE DETERIORATED TO POINT THAT ARCHBISHOP IN RECENT SERMON MADE PUBLIC STATEMENT THAT PAPAL NUNCIO WAS ONLY DIPLOMAT AND SHOULD NOT CONCERN HIMSELF WITH CHURCH AFFAIRS IN EL SALVADOR. PAPAL NUNCIO GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE OF PRESIDENT ROMERO'S POLICIES AND INDICATED HE WOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN CHURCH-STATE RELATIONSHIPS IN EL SALVADOR.

5. COMMENT. DESPITE ON-THE-SPOT ACCOUNTS OF EL SALITRE INCIDENT, THERE ARE STILL A NUMBER OF UNEXPLAINED EVENTS AND CONTRADICTIONARY STATEMENTS WHICH INDICATE THAT TRUTH OF INCIDENT MAY BE SOME COMBINATION OF ALL VERSIONS. WE ALSO BELIEVE IT LIKELY THAT RURAL POLICE DEVELOPED THE STORY ABOUT CATTLE RUSTLERS, AFTER OCCURRENCE OF INCIDENT THEY REALIZED WOULD GET THEM IN TROUBLE, AND PASSED IT UP TO DEFENSE MINISTRY AND PRESIDENT AS ACCURATE REPORT OF EVENTS. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT TOWNSPEOPLE AND MEMBERS OF BPR (BLOQUE POPULAR REVOLUCIONARIO) AND FECCAS, WHO ARE ACTIVE IN AREA, MADE THE STORY MORE SENSATIONAL THAN EVENTS JUSTIFIED IN THEIR ACCOUNT TO THE CHURCH AUTHORITIES. WE STILL BELIEVE THIS INCIDENT SHOULD BE ONE

FOR INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS TO TAKE UP WHEN
IT SENDS A GROUP TO EL SALVADOR.
LUBENSKY

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